

MN, UK Form 'Revolutionary' E-Learning Partnership

MONTEVIDEO, Minn. - The local high school in this small community is about to plug into the English school system - literally. Montevideo High School, located in southwestern Minnesota, is home to one of nine innovative National Guard Distributive Training Technology Project (DTTP) multimedia classrooms in the state. Beginning in October, the high school will leverage these resources, including video-teleconferencing (VTC) capabilities, to conduct regular classes between its students and those from Ercall Wood Technical College in Telford, England.

The National Guard Bureau (NGB) and the Minnesota National Guard worked with school administrators on both sides of the Atlantic to establish an international learning exchange between the two schools. Ten students from each of the two schools will participate in the pilot. Through VTCs, Montevideo students will virtually join their English counterparts to study the English Civil War (1625-1649), as taught by members of the Ercall Wood faculty. The Ercall students, meanwhile, will join their American counterparts via VTC to learn about the American Civil War (1861-1865) with faculty members from Montevideo.

These virtual programs will be run like traditional classes, with homework, reading assignments, and exams. However, to facilitate communication between the two groups, each student will be matched up with an overseas "study buddy." The student pairs will work together via VTC and e-mail to confirm assignments, and coordinate research and presentations. Mr. Phil Stephan, the state's Program Manager for DTTP, noted that "the cultural exchange between the students will be just as important as the academic one." Separate time will be allocated each week so that students can chat and learn about each other on a personal level.

In June, representatives from the two schools signed a formal Memorandum of Understanding while standing on Telford's historic Iron Bridge. Participants included COL William A. Hose, Chief Information Officer (CIO) of the Minnesota National Guard; Mr. David Baukol, Montevideo Superintendent; Mr. Bruce Berguson, Montevideo High School Principal; Mr. Stephan; Ms. Maureen Lischke, NGB CIO; and MAJ Stephan Picard, Chief, DTTP Policy & Liaison.

There are plans to incorporate the exchange program permanently into each school's curriculum. Stephan said he also hoped to partner a school near each of the nine Minnesota DTTP classrooms with a school in the Telford Wrekin borough by the end of next year.

DTTP's MAJ Picard noted the immense benefits of the program. "This is another example of how DTTP enhances the country's communities and enriches the lives of its citizens. With our communications technology, we're helping shape tomorrow's leaders, both at home and around the globe."

The formal VTC kickoff will be held on Saturday, Nov. 8, 2003, at 9:00 am CST. During the event, which will be open to representatives from the media, parents and students from both schools will meet one another and learn more about the program. For information about the kickoff or the program itself, please contact MN ARNG Public Affairs, at 651-282-4415.

